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RUNNING HEAD: Construction of Binge Drinking

The Construction of Collegiate Binge Drinking as a Social Problem in America

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The Construction of Collegiate Binge Drinking as a Social Problem in America

ABSTRACT

The drinking behaviors of college students have gained national attention over the past several years. Deemed by public health researchers as "binge drinking," the issue has created a distinct set of texts under the "public health" frame of discourse that ultimately guides public policy. Using Gusfield's (1996) theory of the construction of "social problems," this paper explores the metaphors found in the discourse surrounding binge drinking on college campuses. The paper then discusses the implications of constructing the social problem of binge drinking under a pathological model. The competing constructions of alcohol consumption that inform public policy are compared with historical and current narratives. A critique of the discourse as representative of the public health movement's impact on culture, along with an agenda for continued cultural research, is provided.

The Construction of Collegiate Binge Drinking as a Social Problem in America

Nancy W. Dickey, M.D., Board Chair of the American Medical Association, stated on May 20, 1996, "Binge drinking by young people is a major public health problem that we can no longer ignore. When 40% of young Americans admit to excessive drinking and 20% to binge drinking . . . we must take dramatic steps to safeguard the lives and health of our young people and to protect the society in which they live."

Spurred by a number of alcohol-related student deaths, the news media have engaged the "binge drinking" discourse of public health specialists, producing both the interpretive framework and the institutional support to wage a rhetorical war on collegiate drinking, particularly within the fraternity. The engagement of this discourse represents a significant change in our cultural framework about alcohol consumption, often labeled as "neo-prohibitionist" (Hansen, 1995, Musto, 1997).

This war, however, raises important questions about the rhetorical construction of social problems, and serves as an excellent case study to examine how the cultural interpretation of alcohol consumption continues to become negotiated for different segments of society. The media, all of who help to establish a concretized interpretation, has employed certain terms, ideologies, and frameworks by the culture about the problem. Despite the outpouring of press declaring a rise in binge drinking, research indicates that excessive drinking has remained steady or has declined slightly on college campuses for the past ten years (Musto, 1997). As David Musto explains, "our perceptions affect the way we think about alcohol more than the rate at which we drink it."

argue that the recent public health gaze placed on alcohol consumption within the college environment (and particularly the institution of the fraternity) has created a belief that excessive drinking on the college campus is a threat to the health and safety of all students. I also argue that the term "binge drinking" has come to symbolize the negative risk factors of drunkenness in all collegiate situations. As such, it is a term whose circumference is curiously limited only to the college campus. I argue further that such a construction has attempted to place an overly simple solution of consumption-as-control (Hanson, 1995) on a much more complex issue. Clearly, the riots this past spring at locations where alcohol was restricted support the critique of rash policy-making.

I first outline a model for understanding the construction of social problems surrounding alcohol. I then walk through the process for the term "binge drinking" in order to identify the dominant story that administrators, parents, public health officials, reporters and editors tell about the social problem. I then compare the narratives of drinking currently and historically, examining their role in negotiating a meaning for excessive drinking behavior. Finally, I identify the key implications of the construction of binge drinking as a social problem in America on the culture at large and suggest an agenda for future communication research.

The construction of social problems

In order to be perceived by society as a problem, any issue must be constructed in such a way that it is seen as troublesome and requiring some specific set of actions. In fact the relationship between the identification and the action is a crucial one. *How* we identify the problem will have a specific bearing on the ways in which we approach solutions. The locus of the problem, the nature of the trouble, and the central element of

the issue all serve as key indications of how action must proceed. If the problem is constructed as a wound, then the wound needs treatment -- the solution is a logical deduction. If the problem is built to be a fierce child-eating dragon, then the death of the dragon becomes the only solution possible. Terministically, the label prescribes the action. In his 1996 text Contested Meanings, Gusfield states:

> As a rhetorical device, the concept of "social problem" is a claim that some condition, set of events, or group of persons constitutes a troublesome situation that needs to be changed or ameliorated. Those who define the problem do so from a standard which involves them in the role of legitimate spokespersons for the society or public interest. Having defined the condition as a "social problem" there is then a legitimate basis for bringing public resources to bear on it in the manner defined. . . ."Social problem" is a term that, like others, has its historical location and terminological function as a linguistic instrument for ordering our understanding and suggesting action. As such it is itself a part of the process which it describes" (p. 17 - 18).

To Gusfield, the construction of social problems involves the establishment of authority -- the "spokesperson." Such a role is granted legitimacy from the public through some standard that resonates within the values of the culture, labeled by Gusfield as "cultural authority" (p. 17). Often, such spokespersons come from established social institutions that make claims about a problematic set of behaviors (Spector and Kitsuse, 1987). Gusfield explains:

> The cultural concept of "social problems" is not something abstract and separate from social institutions. . . To give a name to a problem is to recognize or suggest a structure developed to deal with it. Child abuse, juvenile delinquency, mental illness, alcoholism all have developed occupations and facilities which specialize in treatment, prevention, and reform (1996, p. 19).

Such legitimacy to name the problem, then, is reserved often for those granted authority by society as institutions. Ibarra and Kitsuse (1993) contend that this claims-making process accepts "as given and beginning with the participants' descriptions of the putative conditions and their assertions about their problematic character" (p. 24). The cultural "frame" in which they must address the problem, however, limits such individuals.

Such a frame is often the dominant ideology of the culture. "Facts" are filtered through this ideology, given meaning and importance through their relationship to the cultural frame.

The construction of social problems is therefore a linguistic one, where the terms used to present the problem are crucial to the adoption of legitimacy by the public and the assignment of public resources. Discourse serves as the crucial element in the construction, a notion similar to Burke's concept of symbol use. Gusfield adds, "The concept of "social problem," as an aspect of our language, in turn implies a general framework" (p. 35).

Social problems are born, then, when authorities within the culture are given voice. Terms developed by authorities become endorsed by other forms of discourse (i.e. media coverage, institutional literature) and institutionalized through funding and programs. Underlying this process is an ideological framework, which, as Hall (1986) would say, "articulates" itself to the discourse, allowing the discourse to flourish. Both, then, strengthen each other and help to concretize the discourse.

In order to explore this process for the social problem of binge drinking, I first outline the framework articulated to binge drinking, then explore the birth of the term itself and the ways in which its meaning is extended through news coverage.

Cultural frames of alcohol: The pathological frame

Three common frames within the past century can be seen by the thousands of artifacts and institutions that surrounded them. Prohibition framed alcohol as the ultimate enemy, the cause for society's problems. Temperance Unions published unending volumes of materials decrying the dangers of alcohol to America's children and adults (Hanson,

1995). As policies failed, and drinking resumed, a new frame of alcoholism emerged. Here, the locus of responsibility rested on the individual, who would take on what Parson would describe as the "sick role" (Turner, 1995). Institutions changed from those attempting to remove alcohol to those attempting to separate the individual from the general drinking population in order to provide "treatment."

Recently, however, there has been another movement toward what some call a "public health" frame (Gusfield, 1995; Turner, 1995) where unhealthy behaviors or environments are scrutinized and criminalized for the welfare of the society as a whole. Within this "pathological" frame, certain items are seen with an "assumption of malevolence" (Gusfield, 1995, p. 41). Traces of this appear in cultural expressions about tobacco, alcohol, and high fat foods. Gusfield posits that this assumption has guided the majority of all study of alcohol, particularly from the social sciences. Researchers tend to collect findings that support the view of negative impact, and avoid studying "normal" drinking behavior devoid of negative consequences. Such continued study under the pathological frame only further entrenches the dominant ideology of the culture, which in turn provides authority to those studying alcohol in this fashion.

The establishment of cultural authority

The study of alcohol on the college campus (and its dissemination through the media) has also adopted the assumption of malevolence. No where is this more true than in the landmark study cited most often by the press to support the notion of a "binge drinking problem" on college campuses, published in the Journal of the American Medical Association in 1994 by Dr. Henry Wechsler and his colleagues from the Harvard School of Public Health. Though one of many studies conducted in the past decade, the Wechsler

study would prove to establish cultural authority as a legitimate spokesperson for the problem.

The study, conducted through surveys given to 195 campuses across the country (Newsday, December 1, 1997), provides a classic example of the pathological frame and its impact on the epistemology of alcohol use. First, as Gusfield contends, a standard is created, based not upon medical information but on cultural values. In the Wechsler study, "binge drinking" is defined as consuming five or more drinks at one sitting once or more within a two week period for males, and the consumption of four or more drinks in the same fashion and period for females. A rationale for these amounts and time periods are not given, nor is there an identification of drinking behavior contexts, beverage choices, or environments. Wechsler and his colleagues determined that at least 68% of those between the ages of 18 and 30 have at least three and as many as six drinks on an average night. In their report to the American Medical Association, they state, "This is . . . a testament to the fact that heavy drinking remains a large part of the young lifestyle" (Wechsler, 1994).

More telling of the pathological frame, however, is the nature of the survey itself, which asked students to identify their frequency for such behavior as well as the consequential problems that resulted from the drinking episodes. In one version of the survey results, published through a bulletin produced by the Higher Education Center for Alcohol and Other Drug Prevention (1993), statistical breakdowns of drinking behaviors were interrupted by personal narratives, all tragic, collected from responding students. The stories told of roommates that had to spend the night nursing a drunken friend, or

regretful females expressing their concern that their drunken behavior forced them into a sexually compromising situation.

Finally, the use of the Wechsler study by a host of the media, from Newsweek to the Christian Science Monitor, indicates that Wechsler's findings of binge drinking at epidemic proportions on the majority of college campuses struck a significant chord within the culture. Through the sheer number of citations, quotations, and interviews, Wechsler's position on the problematic nature of alcohol (along with his contention in many interviews that a control of consumption model must be employed) serves as the legitimated voice of the culture, the spokesperson who's rhetorical act of naming the problem lends itself immediately toward the institutional legitimacy of "schools of Public Health" and the allocation of resources for projects such as that sponsored by the AMA.

A linguistic analysis of current discourse

With the pronouncement of a standard, a new terminology, and a set of spokespersons, the construction of binge drinking as a social problem is clearly established. Yet, such a framework must still play itself out in the public discourse. To discover if Wechsler's concept of binge drinking has found adoption by the public, a metaphoric analysis of representative samples of discourse is necessary.

Media coverage of college drinking appears perennially, spurred on by the death or injury of a student, an alcohol-related crime, or a party that turned violent. A set of eight tragic deaths related to alcohol within a single year, combined with the publication of the Wechsler study in America's most prominent medical journal, produced a barrage of news media coverage over collegiate binge drinking -- including the publication of 722 stories within a ten month period. Many of the stories either report a death, the Wechsler study,

or both. Some are syndicated, appearing in a large media outlet and reoccurring in a number of small-town papers. As a result, representative samples of news stories were chosen from daily, weekly and monthly publications during the period from March to December 1997. All stories from the sample employed the term "binge drinking" within the text of the article.

In his book, A Grammar of Motives (1969), Kenneth Burke provides what is now considered the classic method of linguistic analysis through the discovery of the four tropes. Though a complete explanation of the tropes and their use in creating symbolic "truth" is not necessary here, the metaphors embraced in media coverage of binge drinking suggests an ideology where the assumption of malevolence thrives, where individual consequences are enlarged to represent the whole, and where complex sets of values, rituals and myths are reduced to simple concepts of risk, behavior, and policy.

Central Metaphors of the Discourse

News coverage of the issue reveals two key metaphors employed regularly throughout the discussion and supplied directly from field experts. These metaphors are the term "binge" which is constructed as "abuse" and it's corresponding metaphor, "control."

Binge Drinking as "Abuse"

The reporting of another alcohol-related death as well as the discovery of the binge drinking problem were often combined in the media -- the "news" of a recent death would find filler text discussing the "problem" of collegiate binge drinking. For example, Newsweek of October 13, 1997 reports the death of Scott Krueger, an MIT freshman, combining it with the Wechsler study and a discussion of America's problem with

collegiate binge drinking. Other journals, such as New York Newsday, The Kansas City Star, the USA Today, the Boston Globe, and the Lincoln Journal-Star follow suit, all going beyond the story of a college student who had made a tragic mistake and instead publishing a story about the binge drinking problem throughout collegiate America with the death of a student as the primary evidence. Other journals, such as the (Riverside, CA) Press-Enterprise, or the (Dubuque, IA) Telegraph Herald would write an editorial about the problem, using the news item as a call for action against the underlying problem of binge drinking.

Entrenched in these stories is the "abuse" metaphor, which characterizes the drinking habits of college students as abusive. Often, the word is used literally, interchanged with binge drinking as a complimentary term. For example, the Press-Enterprise editorial begins, "All too often, students are thrown into a world where they must face the rising social problem of drug and alcohol abuse without sufficient guidance" (1997, p. A21). Another editorial writes, "Talk to almost any college president, and you will hear that students' abuse of alcohol is a serious problem" (Telegraph Herald, 1997, p a4). Still others imply the term, allowing the use of "binge" to suggest a meaning similar to abuse.

This in itself is interesting. Initially, it could be argued that the term "binge" serves as the abuse metaphor. Bingeing implies a lack of control or moderation, two characteristics that find their synonym in "appropriate use" with the subsequent antonym of "abuse." To binge is to mis-use; to use to excess or to use in such a way as to cause harm, a common meaning for abuse. The term ties immediately to the condition of bulimia, where the afflicted consumes food in extreme amounts only to purge it from their

system later. The stuffing of mouths to get as much in as possible helps construct a clear picture of one "guzzling" to consume as much alcohol as one can. Such an action is judged as harmful. In the case of binge drinking, the case has medical support -- consumption of large quantities of alcohol will lead to a shut-down of the body's systems. Yet, usage of the word "binge" rarely has a positive connotation -- "bingeing" is never a good thing, even though the things we binge on may be of value or at least not in themselves destructive.

Given the definition created by the health care industry for binge drinking -- the consumption of five or more drinks in a single sitting within a two week period (Wechsler, 1995)-- the concept of abuse is now set on a quantity/time ratio. Abuse is measurable. We can count it, identify it, and time it. We do not need to guess. Yet this clear cut definition is also problematic, and creates a complication within the narrative of binge drinking discourse. No one would deny that Scott Krueger, the MIT student who consumed the equivalent of 18 shots of alcohol within a single evening, had abused his system to the point of complete shut-down. His use of alcohol was clearly abusive. Yet, the complication of this metaphor is not in its description of the individual but in the description of the culture. The abuse of Krueger (and a select set of others) becomes representative of the abuse of all college students, and abuse becomes a form of synecdoche. In other words, the single death represents the whole problem rather than an isolated incident. A string of single deaths, within a relatively short period of time, forms a pattern that also represents the whole. It would, however, be an easy guess to state that Krueger was not the only student getting drunk in America on that particular evening. Yet, were all the others, from Maine to California, equally abusive? Does the same

measure count for all? Did Scott Kreuger die of "binge drinking" or from toxic levels of consumption? Under this construction, the two concepts are the same.

As much as the pinning of deaths to the bigger problem of binge drinking becomes synecdoche, the use of the term "binge" to describe all college drinking serves as metonymy, brought to us from the multitude of literature generated by the chemical dependency industry. Here, we reduce anything over a specific amount as "binge drinking" or "abuse." Certainly, it could be argued that a wide range of drinking behaviors and responses exist, where individuals remain functional despite the practice of consuming five beers or glasses of wine at a party every couple of weeks. Yet, this practice would fit the definition of binge drinking, and by doing so, reduces it to that concept. An individual's drinking behavior is no longer considered -- instead, the reduction serves as the complete description.

This reductionistic characterization produces a new way of talking about drinking, giving "the problem" a name and discussing "it" as if "it" were a *thing*. Once identified as a thing, it can be discussed, analyzed, and as Gusfield suggests, ultimately conquered.

Examples of this abound. The USA Today of October 22, 1997 writes:

> Alcohol abuse is the primary culprit, and campus-based education programs have been the norm. But with recent studies suggesting that binge drinking in college is often most likely to occur among fraternity and sorority members, some administrators are focusing new efforts on Greek Row" (p. 5D).

The Press-Enterprise proclaims, "Our colleges and universities should work hard to provide alternatives to binge drinking" (October 19, 1997, p. A21). The PR Newswire of October 17, 1997 dutifully broadcast the apologia of Pennsylvania State University, stating, "While binge drinking and underage drinking plague college communities all across the country, officials at Pennsylvania State University and the Pennsylvania Liquor

Control Board have formed. . ." The "thing" of binge drinking is fully born in the media -- we have something to point at rather than the thousands of isolated problems created by each individual student's behavior.

As seen in the past several examples, surrounding the notion of binge/abuse are powerful satellite terms that give the concept a distinct flavor. Obviously, "death" surrounds the metaphor, as the concept of binge drinking is always tied to a deadly consequence. This is represented with many terms, such as "toxic," lethal," and "dangerous." Attached to the notion of death is the notion of crime, date rape, car crashes and fights -- all which imply a risk to health and happiness due to excessive drinking.

Along with this is the notion of "plague," an interesting term in that it describes the size and scope of the problem and presents it as a disease. Modern society "wipes out" plagues, controls them so that others are not infected. It also implies a lack of culpability for the individual student, one that is expressed in article after article. Binge drinking is ultimately a disease a student "catches" while at college. The infectant is the college environment -- the fraternity, the dorm, the local bar, and the Thursday specials. Hindering the immunity to illness is a lack of education, an inability to prepare students for the realities of alcohol and its deadly pull. The sickness is the culprit, not the one who is sick. Such a belief is expressed in the Riverside, CA Press-Enterprise editorial, which exclaims, "we need to provide safe alternatives for students and educate them on the dangers of excessive drinking and what they can do when someone is in trouble" (October 19, 1997). The disease killed Scott Krueger. He did not, in our construction of binge drinking, commit suicide.

Binge drinking and "Control"

An editorial in the Milwaukee Journal Sentinel begins, "Conventional wisdom teaches that college students drink and that there's not much their elders can do about it. Therefore, while deaths related to binge drinking, including two in Wisconsin this year, are tragic, these things happen. Conventional wisdom may be wrong." Certainly, any set of popular behaviors which have the potential to kill deserve some attention. Yet the public discourse surrounding collegiate binge drinking offers a specific type of action, one that fits neatly into the control-of consumption model and can be seen in the metaphors employed.

Alongside the cluster, which constructs a description of the problem, exists another cluster which centers itself on the metaphor "control." This, too, appears literally in much of the discussion from the media as well as administrators and public health officials. The press release from Penn State quotes president Graham B. Spanier as stating, "We are committed to improving the environment for learning for our students by controlling alcohol and substance abuse at Penn State" (PR Newswire, October 17, 1997). Lori Gazzillo, spokeswoman for the Massachusetts College of Liberal Arts in North Adams, commented to USA Today, "To the extent that we can control behavior, we try" (October 22, 1997).

The metaphor is also developed through the source of the discourse itself. Often quoted are institutions which imply control in their very name, such as the U.S. Department of Education's Higher Education Center for Alcohol and Other Drug Prevention (publisher of a national bulletin for college administrators detailing the results of the Wechsler study), the National Center on Addiction and Substance Abuse at

Columbia University (the source of multiple stories, programs and web sites regarding binge drinking), the Pennsylvania Liquor Control Board (the partner to Penn State helping to keep problems at bay) and a category of officials labeled by the Wechsler bulletin as "substance abuse prevention experts" who advise colleges on appropriate courses of action. As Gusfield theorizes, a social problem once borne has led to a myriad of social institutions.

The metaphor of control surrounds itself with a variety of satellite terms, which create a more specific meaning for the concept. These include "regulation," "attack," "curb," "laws," and "ban." A number of stories focus on control as the removal of alcohol from the campus scene. New York Newsday, in a two part series on the issue, writes, "The mounting death toll has rocked college campuses nationwide, prompting calls for alcohol bans and crackdowns on campus drinking and fraternity hazing rituals, initiation rites that sometimes include alcohol consumption" (December 1, 1997). The USA Today article outlines the "new efforts" taken by college administrators as facilitating a ban on alcohol at university, fraternity, or dormitory functions. The Boston Globe incorporates several of these terms when they write:

> Calls for an alcohol ban at Bridgewater State College, which began last May in response to an alcohol-fueled roit, have grown louder after a rape in a freshman dorm last month and recent alcohol-rlated deaths of students at the Massachusetts Instotute of Technology and the University of Massachusetts at Amherst. State college and university officials across the state are under added pressure to crack down on underage and binge drinking after the state Board of Higher Education last week officially urged the institutions to adopt tough restrictions on alcohol use on campus (October 19, 1997, p.1).

The notion of control as removal permeates the discourse. When education is discussed, the curriculum surrounds abstinence over moderation. The Dallas Morning

News reports of the activities at the University of Texas - Arlington in observance of National Collegiate Alcohol Awareness Week. Though a quote early in the article from Ruth Hudson, coordinator for health education and substance abuse prevention for the campus states, "It's the 30 percent that gets all the attention. We try to give credit to the 70 percent who are responsible drinkers," the article instead focuses on abstinence as the ultimate answer:

> 'Education truly is the key,' she said. 'If people know their options, they can pursue them.' A grant from the National Collegiate Athletic Association has meant UT-Arlington could sponsor Mav Mania night on Thursdays. The alcohol-free events, which include music and games for students, are billed as an alternative to drinking (October 20, 1997, p.1A).

The "control as ban" metaphor is particularly powerful. There is no sense that the dragon can be tamed, brought to less lethal behaviors and taught to help rather than hinder. Instead, it must be killed. Few if any of the sample texts offer the option of moderation. As seen above, the actions celebrated by the public do the National Pan-Hellenic Council and individual fraternities take those that remove alcohol entirely, such as the coverage of the self-imposed ban nationwide. As a result, rather than looking toward a specific set of behaviors that are dangerous, such as the "21 shot" birthday celebration, the beer siphon, or drinking contests, alcohol itself is eliminated. This, too sends a clear message: the problem of "binge drinking" is the substance, and the solution is to remove the substance.

Yet, there is also a sense of criminalization representative in the public health movement, seen in a number of articles that focus attention on the fraternity as the source of the problem and as a focus of the institutional gaze. The national ban of alcohol by many fraternities was in response to a growing pressure by parents and administrators on

fraternities; Newsweek reports that criminal charges and lawsuits are pending in the Kreuger case (as well as in several of the other tragedies). William DeJong, director of the Higher Education Center for Alcohol and Other Drug Prevention, comments in Newsday that "his agency is recommending an "environmental" approach that calls for schools and communities to form coalitions of school leaders, business people, pub owners and local elected officials. 'We are asking people in higher education to speak out for changes in local and state law'"(Perlman, 1997).

The relationship of "abuse" to "control"

Certainly, much can and should be said in critique of the current public discourse surrounding the construction of collegiate binge drinking and the potential effectiveness of attempts to solve the problem. A number of implications make themselves apparent through the analysis. Yet, to fully understand these implications, we must first gain an awareness of the relationship between the two central metaphors as they play themselves out in the discourse.

As theory suggests, an important logic of "if . . .then" connects the clusters of [bingeing as abuse] and [control as ban] in the representative coverage of the problem. If the practice of drinking can be reduced to "binge" behavior, and if "binge" behavior is made to represent a set of lethal or dangerous consequences, then the options for action are immediately narrowed to a specific form of control in the removal of the problem, a banishing of the substance that produces the harmful behavior. Again, the dragon metaphor serves to illustrate the logic. If the dragon kills, we must kill the dragon. As stated earlier, the practice of removing the source of the danger has a historic precedence, particularly surrounding substances such as alcohol.

What is created through the abuse/control metaphor set, then, is a complete and familiar narrative surrounding alcohol, one that has been told at other times in the history of America with uncanny consistency: Alcohol, the evil substance, placed in the hands of the unknowing, unwitting individual, produces a scourge of disaster that ranges from the compromising of health to the destruction of human progress and achievement. Responsible persons must advocate, therefore, for the removal of the substance in order for individuals to live a happy and healthy life, free from the encumbrances created by the substance. In this story, moderation has no position. Society (and in this case, a specific segment of society) is tainted by the poison, so the poison must be removed. The story is simple and complete. Most importantly, if successful, the story ensures a happy ending, a resolution of the crisis without complexity or the complications of individual adaptation.

The similarities to the public story of college binge drinking and the one told by temperance advocates almost a century earlier is striking:

> The chief legacy of this conflict has been a tendency to view all questions on the subject of alcohol in black-and-white terms of right and wrong, good and evil. Under the influence of the Wet-Dry controversy, the question of drinking became an either-or proposition. Either one drank, or one abstained. As a result, drinking and abstinence have come to be thought of as opposites on a scale of bad and good. Abstinence became associated in people's minds with purity and moral strength; drinking, with evil, disease, and degradation. All drinking has been assumed to hold the threat of loss of control and alcohol addiction. And, in the pattern of this thinking, the only effective means of dealing with the problems of alcohol has been to label all drinking as immoral and dangerous, and to pass laws against it (Bacon and Jones, 1968, p. 3).

Yet a significant adaptation to the temperance narrative also indicates that the construction of collegiate binge drinking fits more readily in the present public health frame. Two observations support this view. First, although the focus returns to the control of the substance (allowing the "control/ban" metaphor in the discourse), there is also a focus on the students and the alcohol providers (whether private or commercial) as

public enemies for creating environments where such dangerous behavior may thrive. The attack on the fraternity, in both study and policy, indicates such a criminalized frame. In perhaps the most telling example, the Times Union of Albany, New York reported on December 5, 1997 that UAlbany's Zeta Beta Tau has lost campus recognition for a period of five years over violations in alcohol consumption regulations, noting "the schools investigation into ZBT was conducted by the University Police and a five-member Judicial Board panel of three faculty members and two students" (Hurewitz, 1997).

Second, the public health model of criminalization seeks protection of the public (through risk reduction) where the temperance movement sought the removal of the substance of alcohol as an issue of morality. As has been seen by this analysis, the locus of attention is placed on "safeguarding" this segment of society (the college student). Students themselves are not the focus of the criminal gaze, and, as noted in the Kreuger case, are not held personally liable for their actions. Blame is consistently placed on other social factors: the fraternity, the lack of institutional control, and the availability of substance. This, too, explains the use of synecdoche (death as representative of all binge drinking consequences). Deaths by binge drinking represent a public health risk out of control; eliminating the possibility of death (injury, loss, etc.) rather than the alcohol is the ultimate goal of the policy.

Yet, what is so interesting in the narrative told in 1997 is that the story has a more specific scene in the college environment. None of the discourse surrounding binge drinking raises the issue of "adult" drinking, nor does it attempt to mirror the issue of collegiate binge drinking with adult binge drinking, though anecdotally we are aware that such behaviors also exist for adults. As a result, control is limited to the college

environment, and all bans on alcohol apply only to the student body rather than to the faculty, administration, or community. More importantly, the very concept of drinking appears to be something different for college students than it is for adults.

Another separation emerges that illuminates the connection between the abuse/control story of college drinking and the neo-temperance movement. The separation of regular and sustained binge behavior for the relatively small collegiate population that enacts it (approximately 20% according to the Wechsler study) and the connection to the disease of alcoholism is never made. Nowhere in the public discourse does the concept of dependency to the substance of alcohol arise. Public health officials, administrators, and the media conceive of binge drinking as something other than dependency.

Two important conclusions can be drawn from this realization: public health story of binge drinking is not the same as the story of dependency. The narratives differ significantly in the framing of the problem from that of substance/behavior (binge drinking) to that of personal addiction (dependency). The narrative of dependency is much more complex, requiring individuals to search through personal histories and uncover an emotional, spiritual or even biological need for a substance that, for the rest of the population, does not exist (Yoder, 1990). The narrative of binge drinking, however, ignores the individual and views the substance and a specific set of behaviors as uniformly problematic. From an analysis of the discourse, we can see that this story is clearly the one told for the college campus, and by telling it, an entire range of possibilities are ignored in the approach toward solutions. Cast aside are the notions that those students who regularly drink to excess (identified specifically in the public health studies) may be in early or even advanced stages of dependency. The use of synecdoche within the public

discourse, then, may be keeping such individuals from proper treatment, as they are ignored for the whole represented in the part. Likewise, the metonymy of "binge drinking" may be ignoring important individual factors that contribute to individual behavior. By looking at the problem under the temperance gaze, alternatives are cast aside and possible explanations and strategies are ignored.

Conclusion: Future questions, future directions

Though the analysis of the public discourse of college binge drinking provides insight into the ways in which society tells the story of binge drinking on the college campus, framing it under a model of abuse and control, it raises more questions than it answers. Such analysis does, however, suggest the need for alternative studies into the cultural meaning of binge drinking. Such qualitative research can yield insights into the norms, myths and rituals that perpetuate behavior. Future inquiry must compare the story told by those outside of the culture of student drinkers with those engaging in the behavior. In other words, we must ask how the students who have been labeled as "binge drinkers" tell their story of drinking, and what labels they use to describe behavior.

There is a sense from many in the college community that this story would be radically different in two fundamental ways. First, to the culture itself, the connection between excessive drinking and abuse is non-existent. The hypothesis is that "adventure" replaces "abuse" as the dominant metaphor. Peter Mastriani, Coordinator of Health Education Programs at the State University of New York, Stoneybrooke stated for NPR's All Things Considered: "A lot of publicity that you see in terms of magazines that students read and everything, is all about no fear and living on the edge and that kind of thing. So, that's a strong part of what they're coming in with" (October 16, 1997). The entire notion

of binge drinking, a socio-clinical term, is replaced with the notion of getting drunk, which is associated with good times, fun with friends, and a chance to celebrate a newly found independence. Discourse studies must look at whether these stories are actually created and shared within the culture, and what metaphors are used to communicate the concept among students.

The second fundamental difference, however, lies in the fact that the dominant story may be more myth than reality. Certainly, it could be argued that if as many as fifty percent of the student body were abusing alcohol, death/injury rates would be much higher. This poses an important question -- is the discovery of the number of students who participate in "binge behavior" as high as it is constructed in the public discourse, or are the standards of the label (five drinks per sitting) inaccurate measures of problematic consumption? There is a sense from the discussion of cultural experts that the former is the case. Tales of extreme drunkenness are limited to a select few, and that most students buy into the myth of constant and excessive consumption more than the reality. Lee Pelton, the Dean of Students at Darmouth College, states, "It creates a kind of false culture. Everybody is drinking so -- so that's what the culture is. Well, it turns out that fewer people are actually drinking than most people think they are" (NPR, October 16, 1997). Again, a study of the culture itself can better inform this aspect of the issue, helping to determine how students discuss drinking and what forms of myth the stories evoke.

Finally, more study must explore what appears to be a growing rift between the narratives of public and those of the students. Several facets prove rich for examination, discussion and critique: What power institutions are operating to pronounce and control

college student behavior? What does the control-of-consumption model imply regarding the relationship between the student and the college administrator? How can we reconcile an apparent gap between the assessment of the drinking behavior for college students and that for the rest of society? What implications can a third temperance movement have on a society that has shunned previous attempts at the control as ban metaphor, and the focus of that movement on a specific segment of society that has been historically shielded from such controls? What are the possible outcomes of control as ban strategies, and where can they cause more harm than good?

The questions are endless, yet they are important. Given the growing sense of danger presented by the incidents of death, date rape and violence connected to excessive alcohol consumption, campuses are forced to make decisions that will impact both the students of their institutions as well as the society at large. Yet, examining the discourse of the cultures does far more than inform strategy, it helps the culture to listen carefully to their constructions, to reconcile the constraints that those constructions create, and to hopefully construct more informed stories as they face the challenges of the future.

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